

# Georgia's Workforce Development

# PIPELINE

## One District's Journey

BY MELISSA H. WILLIAMS AND TAMMY L. HUFSTETLER



**T**he Georgia Work Ready initiative began in 2006 to improve the occupational training and marketability of Georgia's workforce, and to advance the state's future economic growth. Governor Sonny Perdue noted, "We need a workforce development system that links workforce development and education together and aligns to the economic needs of the state, its regions and local communities" (February 20, 2006). Georgia Work Ready is a partnership between the state and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. Comprised of three components, Georgia's initiative focuses on job profiling, skills assessment and education/training:

- Job profiling determines the level of skill necessary to learn required job tasks. This component assists employers in building the workforce that they need.
- Developed by ACT, the nationally accredited *WorkKeys* assessment measures core skills and work habits. Core skills which are highly important to most jobs in the workplace include applications in mathematics, reading for information and locating information. These skills are critical for job success in the current market and for mastering the innovative technologies

of future workplaces. Work-related attitudes and behaviors such as cooperation, discipline and ambition are measured by the work habits assessment.

- The training component efficiently closes any identified skill gaps.

### Determining Work Readiness in Bartow District

To answer the questions "Are you Work Ready?" and "Can your graduates apply the skills they have to meet the needs of business and industry today?" our community created a team of economic development, government and education partners to meet specific criteria required to earn the status of a Certified Work Ready Community. As educational leaders in our community, we understand and embrace our role in economic development. If our educational institutions cannot produce students who are ready to enter today's highly technical job market, how can new business and industry be drawn to our community?

To become a Work Ready Community in Georgia, counties must demonstrate a commitment to improving the high school graduation rate as well as produce a specified number of Work Ready Certificates from the available workforce pool. Georgia's workforce development initiative measures the real-world skills of individuals, provides valuable job training and assists employers in the efforts to match the right people to the right positions.

Our community participated in the accelerated grant program, which means goals were to be achieved within 18 months. The stakeholders in the community Work Ready team included the Bar-

tow County School System, Cartersville City Schools, Cartersville-Bartow County Chamber of Commerce, Bartow County Economic Development Department, Cartersville Career Center (Department of Labor), Bartow County Government, City of Cartersville, and North Metro Technical College (now Chattahoochee Technical College).

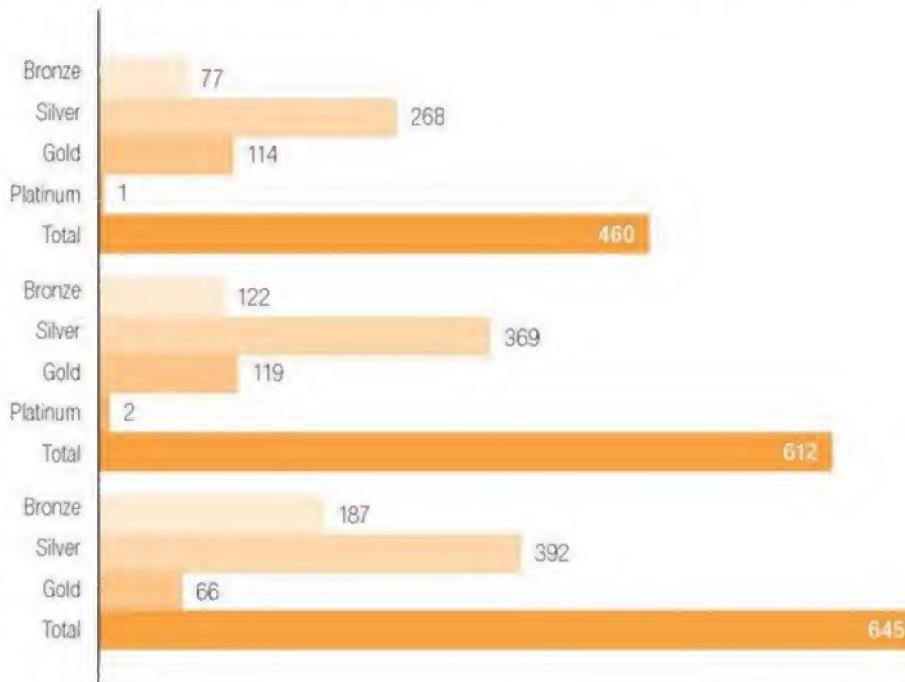
Our goals were to improve the high school graduation rate and to encourage the current and available workforce to earn Work Ready Certificates. Our targeted specified labor market groups consisted of the private sector and public entities, the unemployed, current high school seniors and recent graduates, as well as GED completers and college graduates. The goal was for 871 community members to earn Work Ready Certificates; results produced 1,713 certificates for Bartow citizens—97 percent above the initial goal. High school seniors represented 1,072 certificates within the initial 18 months with 1,717 graduates earning Work Ready Certificates in the past three years.

### Administering Work Readiness Initiative in Bartow Schools

The Bartow County School System has worked to ensure that our graduates are prepared to meet the workforce demands of the community. For three years now, the *WorkKeys* assessment has been administered to all seniors in the district's high schools. Results indicate that more than 90 percent of our graduates are Work Ready, and distinction is given in graduation programs to those seniors earning Work Ready Certificates. Students' certificates are awarded along

## WORK KEY CERTIFICATES

2007



with their high school diplomas. Through these endeavors, we strive to add value to the certificate and show students that they possess marketable skills.

During the Bartow County Work Ready process, the combined high school completion rates for Bartow County and Cartersville City increased from 64.5 percent to 72.4 percent. Bartow County School System has reported significant gains in completion rates. In 2006, the graduation rate was 60.6 percent. Five-year trends indicate the graduation rate has increased to 82.5 percent. The graduation coaches, work-based learning coordinators, and career-technical instructors employed by Bartow County Schools have participated in the Work Ready assessment and earned certificates themselves. If school personnel perceive the value of the Work Ready Certificate, they can assist students in their efforts and continue to help ensure a focus on learning and readiness beyond graduation—creating lifelong learners; after all, a community's commitment to lifelong education is vital for driving businesses to an area.

### The Role of the State's Technical College System

The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) has been tasked with the implementation of the Georgia Work Ready Program. Community technical colleges across the state provide administration of the WorkKeys assessments, access to the skill gap training and job profiling services. It is the mission of TCSG to provide technical and academic training focused on building a well-educated, globally competitive workforce for Georgia.

By expanding Certified Work Ready programs, goals and strategies for the technical colleges encompass building economic vitality for the state's workforce.

Georgia Work Ready Regions were created to focus on the state's emerging, transitioning and existing workforce, and to meet the needs of specialized industries in geographical areas. Region goals include: profiling regional strategic industry jobs, supporting counties in the effort to reach Work Ready goals, closing skill gaps, ensuring the education community graduates enough new talent, developing career pathways aligned to critical occupations, and building an industry network to lead the effort. Georgia has identified seven strategic sectors: advanced communications, advanced manufacturing, aerospace, bioscience, energy, logistics, and entertainment.

Due to high profile international companies being located in Bartow County, our community became involved in the Northwest Georgia Advanced Manufacturing region—known as Auto Alley. Uniquely situated in the tri-state region on the corridor between major auto assembly plants (Mercedes-Benz, Volkswagen and Kia Motor Company), 13 counties partnered to focus on automotive parts manufacturers. The region's proximity to these plants provides not only attractive community locations, but also a leveraged talent pool for manufacturing suppliers. Georgia Work Ready

### Awarding the Work Ready Certificates

Work Ready Certificates are awarded based on the lowest level earned in any of the three core assessment areas. For example, if an individual's scores on the three tests are four, four and five, he or she will earn a Silver Level Certificate. Individuals earning a Silver Certificate possess skills required for approximately 65 percent of jobs and scored at minimum a four on core tests; Bronze Level means a score level of three on tests, qualifying the worker for 35 percent of jobs. A Platinum Certificate signifies that an individual scored at least a level six on each core assessment and has the necessary skills for 99 percent of jobs in the WorkKeys database. Gold Level means a score of at least five on core assessments with skills necessary for 90 percent of jobs. For more information, visit [www.gaworkready.org](http://www.gaworkready.org).

Regions are linking education and workforce development through career pathways that graduate students prepared to fill these jobs. Work Ready Regions are supporting continuous education by creating pathways for students to begin their career development in high school, and continue through specialized programs at the postsecondary level.

### Incentives for the Unemployed to Earn Work Ready Certificates

In the current economic downturn, the Governor's Office of Workforce Development has launched Be Work Ready. By earning a Work Ready Certificate, this program offers an incentive to unemployed Georgians who are not full-time students and are actively seeking employment. An individual can apply for a financial incentive to assist with job search expenses. Be Work Ready is funded through the American

Recovery and Reinvestment Act. A total of \$1.8 million was distributed to more than 21,000 Georgians from June 2009 to November 2010.

### Work Ready Connect

Work Ready Connect, the state's newest resource, was unveiled in September 2010 and serves as an online employment marketplace. The tool brings together Work Ready Certified persons and employers to ensure that the right employee is placed in the right job. Job seekers can post resumes and browse job postings. Employers can search talent pools and post job offerings. Work Ready Connect is free to individuals holding a Work Ready Certificate and companies that prefer or require certificates in the hiring process.

Making an investment in the state's success in 2010, Georgia Work Ready put \$5 million into an effort to produce 50,000 additional Work Ready Certi-

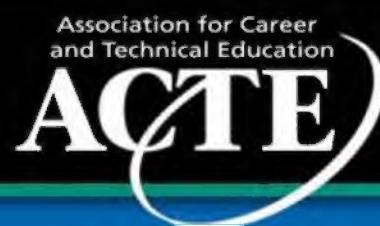
fied Georgians—of which 10,000 should find jobs resulting in \$265 million earned in direct wages. Of 159 counties in the state, 146 are participating at some level in Work Ready Communities. Georgians have earned 165,445 certificates through September 2010, creating a workforce development pipeline. The Work Ready initiative is Georgia's number one economic development advantage. ■

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## CONSULTATIVE SERVICES

The Association for Career and Technical Education offers a wide variety of customized services to support organizational development and drive school improvement resulting in student success. ACTE's highly qualified consultants provide services tailored to the individual needs of our clients.

For more information, please contact Jan Bray at [jbray@acteonline.org](mailto:jbray@acteonline.org)

ACTE's Consultative Services can deliver customized services to institutions, districts or agencies.

#### SAMPLE TOPIC AREAS INCLUDE:

- ★ Leadership and CTE Program Development
- ★ Strategic Planning and Organizational Development
- ★ Marketing CTE and Enrollment and Retention Strategic Planning
- ★ Career Pathways and Career Academies
- ★ CTE Business and Community Partnerships